

Good Afternoon Chairman Sinrud and Committee Members.

I am Deborah Neuman, Executive Director a community based, family centered organization in Gallatin Valley called Thrive, formerly Prevent Child Abuse, Inc. I am a proponent of HB 608. I am sorry I could not stay this afternoon to testify.

Thrive has been serving the Gallatin Valley for 20 years.

The mission of THRIVE is to encourage healthy family development through community awareness, parent education and support to children and families, thereby reducing the incidence of child abuse and neglect and ensuring positive outcomes for children. The goal of our programs is healthy families - successful children. We believe that every child needs care and nurturance to be healthy, successful and reach his/her maximum potential, every parent needs access to information, support and resources to assist him/her through the parenting years and that every family deserves to be viewed from the perspective of their strengths and treated with respect. Our approach is to provide pro-active support to all parents and their children, across the entire range of the parent-child relationship. We have developed programs based on family needs, community assets, best practices and research.

Our target population includes all parents with children of all ages. Stable, experienced parents who wish to improve their skills have access to our services, as do parents with serious challenges including lack of stable support systems, poverty and poor parent role models. Our services are open to any and all parents in our community, with a particular emphasis on providing outreach and support to young, at-risk, first-time, isolated and/or vulnerable parents.

Research tells us:

"What young children learn, how they react to events and people around them and what they expect from themselves and others are deeply affected by their relationships with their parents, the behavior of their parents and the environment of the homes in which they live. Even when young children spend most of their waking hours in child care – parents remain the most influential adults in their lives" From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development, National Research Council Institute of Medicine

There are many threats to child wellness and healthy development. Some of those are: lack of knowledge about parenting, lack of time to parent, maternal depression, shifting family structure, teen parenting, mental illness and alcohol and drug abuse.

In The Gallatin Valley there are many stressors and challenges for families

- A local survey showed increases in depression and stress particularly between the ages of 25 and 55, the prime time when families have to balance parenting and work. (Gallatin County Community Health Assessment, 2000)
- Bozeman has the highest cost of living in Montana, including the highest childcare costs, the highest average rent and the highest average mortgage payments (Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 5/12/02).

- Belgrade has been named the fastest growing community in the state for 3 out of the last 4 years. This kind of explosive growth brings “growing pains” to a community including increases in poverty, crime, child abuse, drug and alcohol use, etc.

Other Montana communities have these and other unique stressors on families.

One of Thrive’s programs is the Parent Place Family Resource Center supported in part by the MT Children’s Trust Fund. Parent Place programs are designed to help parents develop strong bonds with their children, build a good foundation for their child’s healthy development and reduce the impact of these pressures on today’s families. We find every way possible to get parents the information and support they need, when, where and how they need it. The ultimate goal of our Bozeman and Belgrade Parent Places is to provide every parent with the opportunity to receive the information, support, and community resources they need to effectively parent their children. This information and support is always easily accessible and respectfully provided with an emphasis on the strengths of the family. Simply put, we firmly believe that strong and successful families truly form the backbone of a safe, strong and successful community. The Parent Place Family Resource Centers serve an integral role in continuing to make that happen for any and all families within the Gallatin Valley community.

We began the Parent Place in Bozeman and after 13 years expanded Parent Place services to Belgrade to meet growing needs in that community.

Services offered through the Bozeman and Belgrade Parent Places range from basic parenting information, to support groups, to intensive one-on-one support depending on family need. Parent Place Family Resource services include:

#### One-on-One Parent Support

Parents and community professionals can call or visit the Parent Place and talk to a professional parent educator or family support staff. The staff will work with the parent to work through a variety of issues, ie. handling tantrums, sleep problems, peer problems, sibling issues, behavior problems, defiance, co-parenting, parenting through divorce, etc.

#### Referrals

Referrals are made to local services for parents who need health/mental health care, housing, jobs, legal advice, or other community resources. We frequently help parents make appointments, find transportation and even fill out eligibility forms if the family needs that assistance. Our close collaborations with other service providers are invaluable in assisting us to provide this service.

#### Support Groups

Support groups provide an opportunity for parents of infants, toddlers and teen parents to interact with their children, other parents and Parent Place staff. *McMoms* is a group for teen parents. *Play groups* and *Gym days* are provided and are particularly appreciated by parents who have multiple young children at home and few outside recreational or social opportunities. *Dynamite Dads* is

designed for and by fathers and other significant males. Dads participate in a variety of activities in this group with their children.

#### Parent Place Classes

Our class topics include infant/parent bonding, child development, children's temperaments, discipline, raising responsible children, sibling rivalry, playground politics, kindergarten readiness, personal safety for children, building resiliency, etc. Classes focus on helping parents feel more confident and teach them positive parenting strategies.

Parent Place courses include:

-*Love and Logic*: nationally recognized parenting curriculum focused on positive parenting and discipline for children 0-18. Taught by trained and certified Love and Logic teachers on the THRIVE staff.

-*Ages and Stages Windows of Opportunity in Your Child's Development* is an informal opportunity to learn and discuss the many ways you can support healthy development in your baby through knowledge and simple fun activities.

-*Parent Share* is a free monthly class offered on a variety of topics

#### New Parent Packets

Information for parents about child developmental stages, positive parenting practices, and community resources are distributed to all new parents through physicians, midwives, DPHHS, County Health, and Head Start.

#### Parent Share Newsletter

This monthly publication contains articles appropriate for parents with children in each developmental stage. There is a special section for dads and announcements of upcoming classes and meetings.

#### Web-Site

Easily accessible information about parenting, available services and a current calendar of events.

The outcomes of the Parent Place are:

- increased parental awareness of child development stages and appropriate responses to these stages
- increased healthy family interactions and communications
- improved parenting skills
- reduced parental isolation by providing opportunities for parents to interact with other parents and their community especially during times of increased stress
- increased use of community resources for families
- increased opportunities for healthy, developmentally appropriate and fun activities for families

We have been able to provide these supports to families in part as a result of MT Children's Trust Fund. Many communities have no services of this type and would benefit from increased funding to the MT Children's Trust Fund.

Now, we are all Montanans. We are not now, nor ever have been, or ever wish to be like other states. ☺ (This way interjected for comic relief- it has been a long day for the committee)

But Legislatures nationwide are allocating funds for primary prevention – parent education and family support programs - based on the growing body of evidence about the critical nature of the early years and the critical role that parents play in those early years. Even more importantly, legislatures nationwide are allocating these funds based on a preponderance of evidence of the economic impact on the education system, the health and human service system and the justice system of not doing so.

I thank you for your time and urge you to support families in Montana by voting yes on HB 608.